

LEON PARRISH FOX

MAN OF THE CENTURY



Michael A. Shea M.D.
6807 Leyland Park Drive
San Jose CA 95120
408 268 5820

This biography is dedicated to the memory of:

Stephen Anderson Fox

and

Pamela Gay Fox

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Pamela Jensen, managing editor at the Santa Clara County Medical Society, furnished me with a copy of an interview with Dr. Fox by the historical committee recorded in 1985. It was an especially valuable source of information. Carol Skinner, manager of the ob/gyn department at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, enabled me to have data on the residency program and the Valley Medical Center man of the century award. Debra Scarborough, history librarian and archivist for the American College of OB/Gyn, who supplied needed data on Dr. Fox's positions held in ACOG and papers published during his lifetime.

Members of the Fox family also were wonderful contributors. Joyce Fox Rogers, Leon's youngest sister of Winchester, Kentucky remembered much of his childhood in regard to schooling and his early years in Kentucky. Leon Parrish Fox JR. had saved books and boxes of information regarding the war years and family history. The daughters of Dr. Fox, Nancy, Judy and Jennifer also told me of their individual lives as well as that of their mother, Cleo.

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PREFACE

From a one room school house in the hills of Kentucky to a residency program in obstetrics and gynecology at Santa Clara County Hospital, Leon P. Fox made the grade. After a four and a half year tour of duty in the Navy, serving as a medical officer on a troop transport ship in World War II, Leon began an illustrious career in the politics, practice and education of medicine. He served as a delegate for the American Medical Association and the California Medical Association. He acted as a diplomat and treasurer for a national medical organization, The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. He served as Chief of Staff at Santa Clara County Hospital (changed to Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in 1967), O'Connor Hospital and San Jose Hospital. He helped found the Shufelt Gynecologic Society of Santa Clara Valley and became chairman and director of the ob/gyn residency program at the Santa Clara County Hospital from 1959 to 1970. He researched, wrote and published twenty articles in his specialty. He practiced medicine in San Jose, California for over thirty years and delivered over ten thousand babies in his lifetime.

Elaborating on these remarkable achievements will form the major portion of the biography. In conclusion, I would like to describe one of my favorite stories. It's about the man rather than the doctor.

During the years 1970 to 1980 it was my privilege to assist Leon in many gynecological surgical cases at San Jose Hospital. Following each case we would return to the physicians locker room in order to change from scrub suits to street clothes. After the first few times I noticed that Leon was always the first one to change and the first one out of the locker room. I decided to change this order and started racing back from surgery to dress as fast as I could. He was totally unaware of this little game. Flying through my combination lock I would fling open the locker door. Scrubs would go flying in the general direction of the laundry bag while I grabbed for shirt, slacks, coat and shoes. I changed as fast as I could but the result was always the same. He continued to be first out the door. I never could catch him. I don't know many who could.

THE EARLY YEARS

The ring of a phone will focus your attention like no other sound I know. This particular call happened in the spring of 1967. The voice of the caller was slow and deliberate as he made me an offer I did not refuse. It was the position of first year resident in the obstetric and gynecologic program at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center located in San Jose, California. The person making the offer was the chairman of the residency program, Dr. Leon Fox. The rest of this story is about the man on the other end of the phone, Leon Parrish Fox. It began November 21, 1911. Leon was born to Milton and Hallie Fox in a small village named Trapp in the southeast section of Clark County, Kentucky. It is a rural area covered with knobs (low lying hills) and thick groves of maple, poplar and pine trees. It lies about twenty five miles southeast of Lexington, Kentucky.

Leon was the oldest of five siblings. The other children were Elkin, born 20 July 1914, Marie and Milton junior (twins), born 20 January 1917 and Joyce, born 17 April 1933. The family lived in a house next door to their father's general store. They all had their turns in working at dad's store during their younger years. Local politicians frequented the store and many civic matters were decided by these men under the watchful eye of papa Milton. Leon's interest in politics no doubt had its origin here and contributed to his activities and achievements in later life. Kindergarten through high school took place across the street from the Fox family home in a one room school house. Leon who was always known as the smart but quiet one was just three years of age when he started school and sixteen when he graduated. One incident in high school that stood out in Leon's memory was when he fell out of a swing and broke his arm. His father took him into town which was about ten miles away to see the local M.D., Dr. Ishmael. He set the fracture and Leon's father became curious asking a lot of questions. Dr. Ishmael got down the medical books and showed him how he treated the break. Then they drove around the corner to the radiologist who took an xray and told them it looked real good. On the way home his dad said "you know if I were you¹ Leon, I'd be a doctor".

EDUCATION

Taking his father's advice he started his pre-med education in 1927 at Kentucky Wesleyan College. This was a methodist college in Winchester, Kentucky which was close to home. A small pre-med society at school impressed Leon and nourished his growing interest in medicine. Since this was a two year school it was on to the University of Kentucky in Lexington to complete his undergraduate studies. He graduated in 1931 with a bachelor of arts degree. Medical school was the next step and it was to be the University of Louisville Medical School in Louisville, Kentucky. Graduation came in 1934 and plans for internship were already underway. Although Leon's mother wanted her boy to intern in Kentucky, the ultimate decision was Santa Clara County Hospital in San Jose California. So in June of 1934 Leon and two of his fellow M.D.s, Jim Mayo and Bob Douds fired up a 1929 Plymouth and made California or bust their motto. Each was going to a different location in California where all became successful physicians.

June 26, 1934, Leon Fox walked in the door at Santa Clara Hospital, dressed in a white linen suit and white buck shoes. In true southern gentlemanly style he asked the secretary who could help him with his bags. It did not take long for him to find out that interns handled their own bags and almost every thing else in the hospital. Twenty dollars a month, meals and laundry comprised the internship benefits. Interns in those days lived at the hospital and shared their quarters. Leon had three roommates: Jack Fogleman, Ezra Evans and Jack Boden. Six week rotations through various divisions of medicine made up the year. These included: surgery, internal medicine, obstetrics, pediatrics along with other subspecialties such as anesthesia, pathology, orthopedics and tuberculosis. The latter was a large part of medical care and treatment in the 1930's and 1940's. A significant number of Dr. Fox's peers became infected with tuberculosis although he himself never became ill.

Obstetrics and gynecology began to interest Leon at this time. He asked the chief of the county hospital, Dr. D. Wilson, if he could enter the residency program for ob/gyn at the

hospital. Dr. Wilson told him he was too young to be an ob/gyn man. He said “go grow yourself a mustache, put on a pair of glasses and if you can get Dr. Shufelt to take you for a year, I’ll let you start your residency”². And that is exactly what he did.

DR. A. SHUFELT

Dr. Alson Anderson Shufelt or Shuey as he was known to most of his peers, was the first obstetrician gynecologist to establish a permanent practice in the Santa Clara Valley. He was born in Reno Nevada on July 17 1891. At age seven his mother died in childbirth and he later resolved to be an ob/gyn and dedicate his life to improving the care of women in obstetrics. After living with his grandparents in Minnesota, he returned to Reno to rejoin his father who had remarried. He attended U.C. Berkeley for college and received an M.D. after four years at the University of California in San Francisco. His internship and ob/gyn residency were also at UCSF. In 1922 Dr. Shufelt began a solo practice at Sixth and Santa Clara streets in San Jose, California. During his twenty eight years of practice he acted as the first chairman of the obstetric department at county hospital, serving for several years and teaching many of the residents himself. He was known for his kindness and generosity of time as many residents and patients attested to during those years. He was a meticulous surgeon who taught his students, including Leon, the lessons of careful anatomical dissection when performing hysterectomies and cesarean sections. He was always a credit to his profession, to his community and a wonderful role model for young aspiring doctors.

RESIDENCY

Leon began a one year preceptorship with Dr. Shufelt in 1935 and developed much of his surgical skills under the guidance of Shuey. In 1936, mustache in place and preceptorship completed, Leon became the first ob/gyn resident at Santa Clara Hospital. He was given credit for the year with Dr. Shufelt which allowed him to complete the residency in just two more years. Dr. Shufelt was one of his principle teachers along with Dr. Les Magoon, who would be a future associate of Leons.

A residency program in obstetrics in 1936 would still be familiar to present day residents. The day would begin with hospital rounds where both postpartum and post operative patients would be seen by a team of doctors made up of an intern, resident and sometimes an attending staff physician(a doctor in private practice who donated his time and expertise to teaching). The rest of the day would consist of surgery, seeing patients in outpatient clinic, educational seminars, deliveries and hopefully lunch somewhere in between. Nightcall generally came every third day and would routinely be interrupted by phone calls, emergency room visits or deliveries. Endurance became a necessary quality in every resident and Leon developed more than his share.

CLEO

It was during the residency program that another very important person would come into Leon's life. Her name was Cleo Odem. She was the sixth child of Anderson and Nancy Odem. She was born October 1 1917 in Sheridan, Oregon. Her mother died when she was a child and her older sister, Edna Mae, raised both Cleo and her sister Marjorie. The family lived and attended school in Oregon. Cleo went on to nursing school at St. Joseph's Hospital in San Francisco from 1934 to 1937. She and Leon met while Cleo was taking some of her training at the Santa Clara County Hospital. They fell in love and eloped to Reno, Nevada where they were wed on September 11, 1937. The marriage resulted in six children, two boys and four girls. All were born in San Jose, California.

THE FOX FAMILY

Leon Parrish Jr. born July 11, 1940, Nancy Elizabeth born March 13, 1942, Pamela Gay born March 3, 1944, Stephen Anderson born October 10, 1947 and died December 10, 1947 and Judith Ann and Jennifer (twins) born August 25, 1951. Leon P. Fox Jr. attended Mariposa grammar school and Bellarmine College Prep School in San Jose. He received an A.A. degree from Menlo College, Menlo Park California in 1959 and a B.A. degree in English/Social Studies from Northwestern University at Evanston, Illinois in 1961.

In 1965 Leon entered the U.S. Navy, was designated a naval aviator in 1967 and served as a helicopter pilot and legal officer for three and a half years in Lakehurst, New Jersey. He was deployed to the Arctic Ocean and Cuba and was retired for disability following a training accident in 1969. He received a law degree from Hastings College of Law at San Francisco. He became a Superior Court Judge on December 29, 1982. He retired from the bench in January of 2003.

Leon's first marriage was to Jan Whitmer in April 1965. They had two sons, Leon Parrish Fox III and John Stephen Anderson Fox. They divorced in 1989. January 1, 2005 Leon married Vanessa Zecker and they currently reside in Willow Glen, a suburb of San Jose.

Nancy Fox attended St. Mary's Grammar School and Notre Dame High School in San Jose. She received a B.S. degree in education at the University of Oregon in 1963. She taught elementary school until 2002. Nancy married Kent Thayer Jr., a urology doctor. They have two children, Andrea and Kent Thayer III. Nancy and Kent reside in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Pamela Fox, the third child of Cleo and Leon attended Hillbrook elementary school and Notre Dame High School in San Jose. She completed one year of college at the University of Arizona and went to work full time for Wells Fargo Bank. She transferred to the Comerica Bank where she worked as Vice President. Pamela passed away in 1997 from lung cancer. This same disease caused the death of her mother, Cleo Fox, in 1999.

Judith Ann, one of the twins, attended Hillbrook Elementary School and Notre Dame High School. She graduated in 1969. She received her LVN degree from Mission College in San Jose. She now lives in Atascadero and works as an LVN at Cal Poly Health Center in San Luis Obispo, California. She is married to Dennis J. Correia and they have two sons, Eric and Neil. Neil is currently a first year ob/gyn resident in Roanoke, Virginia.

Jennifer Fox, the other twin, attended Hillbrook Elementary School and Notre Dame High School. She attended San Jose City College and Santa Rosa Jr. College. For twenty two years she taught yoga at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California. Many of her yoga students were

referred by local physicians who felt the yoga training would compliment the patients medical treatment. She now lives in Montrose, Colorado where she works with horses using a corollary of yoga known as horsewhispering. She has one daughter, Casie Hallie.

In 1938 Leon received his certificate of completion in the ob/gyn residency program. He began private practice the same year in the St. Claire building in downtown San Jose. There were only three other doctors in that building at the time. They were Drs. Hal Williams, Tony Bonnani and George Waters. Leon was the only ob/gyn physician among them.

WORLD WAR II

December 7, 1941 resulted in a change of plans for nearly eighty percent of practicing physicians in San Jose. July 1942 found Dr. Fox in the medical corp of the United States Navy. He was commissioned as a full lieutenant. His assignment was the U.S. Humphreys (APD12), a troop transport ship, designated to the Pacific Theater. It would function as a medical facility, bringing wounded soldiers from island invasion forces to hospital ships or land based hospitals in the Pacific region. Capacity was two hundred soldiers, one physician and a small number of corpsmen. Their job was to take care of the wounded men and keep them stable until they could reach more advanced care facilities. The most traumatic experience recorded by Dr. Fox was having to amputate a young soldier's leg in order to save his life. The operation was successful.

There was occasional R&R for all aboard when the ship would visit Brisbane Australia. It was there that Leon was able to see his brother, Sgt. Milton B. Fox who was in the Army. They were able to spend their first Christmas together in twelve years.

Thirty six months of sea duty comprised most of Dr. Fox's active duty in the Navy. This included first wave participation in twelve invasions. Among these were the Battles of Leyte, Luzon, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. He received two letters of commendation for his naval service. After the war was over Dr. Fox was promoted to Lieutenant Commandor and transferred to Mare Island in

San Pablo Bay twenty five miles northeast of San Francisco. The naval shipyard covered most of the island where fifteen hundred and ninety eight ships were either repaired or built during World War II. Responsibilities for the Lieutenant Commander were mainly ob/gyn related. January 1946 marked Leon's discharge from the service and his return to his family and private practice in San Jose.

THE SHUFELT SOCIETY

Shortly after reopening his practice at a new location on 14th and Santa Clara Street in San Jose, Dr. Fox turned his attention to one of his passions, medical education. It was in 1946 that Dr. Fox founded the Shufelt Gynecologic Society of Santa Clara Valley. The name was chosen to honor Dr. Alson Shufelt who acted as the society's first president. The organization consisted of local ob/gyn physicians who met monthly for dinner and an educational lecture given by speakers with expertise in their particular field of medicine. In addition there was an annual two day fall seminar sponsored by the society. It centered primarily on ob/gyn subjects with guest speakers from all across the United States. This local society became very successful largely because of the energy and enthusiasm for medical education that characterized Dr. Fox. He served as president from 1957 to 1959. The Shufelt Society endured for fifty nine years with the last meeting held in 2005. Dr. Wakako Nomura, an ob/gyn physician at Kaiser Hospital in Santa Clara was the last president.

COUNTY RESIDENCY

One of the most significant and respected accomplishments attributed to Dr. Fox was the ob/gyn residency program at the Santa Clara County Hospital. Although he was not the original chairman of the department, he assumed the chairmanship and directorship in 1959. Prior to that time, Dr. Shufelt followed by Dr. James Muir acted as chairmen of the department. Under Dr. Fox's watch twenty nine doctors received their ob/gyn certificates from 1959 to 1970. The three year residency was fully accredited by the American College of Ob/Gyn and was considered one of

the finest private programs in the country. Twenty one out of the twenty nine graduated residents remained in the Santa Clara Valley for their practice. Encouraged by Dr. Fox, almost all of them became attending staff at the valley program donating their time and talents in resident teaching. Leon cared deeply for his residents and always made certain there was adequate experience, diversity of pathology and quality supervision in order for the graduate to be fully prepared for private practice.

Stanford Medical School assumed the program in 1970 and for the next seven years Stanford residents maintained the county residency. In 1977 the program again went private when Dr. Theodore Fainstat became chairman and director. Under his guidance and leadership the residency remains to this day an example of quality medical education.

Dr. Fox was also somewhat of a pioneer when it came to women in medicine. He firmly believed they could participate on an equal basis with men in the obstetric and gynecologic field. This philosophy was in evidence when he encouraged and accepted Dr. Suzanne Regul into the residency program in 1965. She was the first female resident since the founding of the program and this was at a time when there were very few women in obstetrical residencies. He was also involved in nursing training by serving on the advisory boards of three nursing schools, San Jose City College, San Jose State University and San Jose Hospital. Students rotated through his office on fifteenth street, fulfilling part of their training requirements for office nursing duties and skills.

THE PARTY

When the residency program at the county hospital passed to the department of ob/gyn at Stanford University Medical School in 1970, it was a major changing of the guard. Before this actually took place, Dr. Fox felt so strongly about his attending staff that he ensured them all associate or assistant clinical instructor status with Stanford Medical School. He was watching out for his own. As a result of the major change in the residency program, the county graduates decided to honor Leon with a dinner and award ceremony at Zorba the Greek, a local restaraunt.

Dr. Fred Schlichting was in charge of the festivities. The most vivid memory of the evening was when all the M.D.s watched a scantily clad miss emerge from a giant three tiered cake followed by an apparent San Jose police officer proclaiming loudly that he was here to arrest the young lady for indecent exposure and the rest of the guests were to remain seated while names, addresses, and phone numbers were taken. Ten seconds of panic were eased when the prank was revealed by the perpetrator and master of ceremonies, Dr. Fred Schlichting. The remainder of the evening went without incident but the occasion is still keenly remembered by all who were there.

NATIONAL OB/GYN SOCIETIES

The American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology was founded in 1930. Its purpose was to evaluate and certify those physicians who had completed an ob/gyn residency. This certification was accomplished by giving a written examination to a candidate during his residency and an oral examination two to three years into his practice. Dr. Fox completed his boards just after returning from the war.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) had its origin on September 5, 1951. The purpose of this national organization was to establish and maintain the highest standards for ob/gyn care in educational and clinical practice. The organization also promoted research and publications in the field of obstetrics and gynecology. Leon was accepted as a Founding Fellow in ACOG in 1951. From 1969 to 1972 he served as vice-chairman of District VIII (west coast) and in 1976 he was elected treasurer of ACOG which at the time represented more than twenty thousand physicians across the United States. He held this position until 1982.

Leon published twenty papers from 1956 to 1985. They appeared in various medical journals such as the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Western Journal of Medicine, Trans Pacific Coast Obstetrical Gynecological Society and California Medicine. These papers were written about clinical disorders in ob/gyn. Each paper required many hours of

research, reading and writing before it would be presented to a journal for publication. He felt the work to prepare an article would increase his knowledge of the subject. It was a very effective method of continuing medical education.

PRIVATE PRACTICE

In 1956 Leon and associate Les Magoon were joined in practice by Dr. Bert Johnson fresh from his residency at Northwestern University in Chicago. He stayed for about 2 years and then moved over to the Good Samaritan Hospital area near Los Gatos. Bert would later serve as vice-chairman of the ob/gyn residency program at County Hospital. He was very active in teaching the residents especially in gyn surgery. Dr. Merlin Johnson, following his discharge from the Navy came on board in 1957 and remained with Dr. Fox until 1977 when he moved his practice to the Good Samaritan Hospital area.

Leon and Les Magoon built a new office building in 1958 at 303 North Fifteenth Street. This location was just three blocks from San Jose Hospital. The convenience of this short distance was one of the reasons that inpatient care (deliveries and surgeries) was ultimately limited to San Jose Hospital. The only other hospital that he had used was O'Connor Hospital which was several miles away. The new building had four physician offices with two exam rooms for each doctor and two separate reception rooms. A fifth doctor's office and exam room were added later. Leon and Dr. Magoon occupied one half of the building and leased the other half to two independent M.D.s. The building was somewhat unique in that all exam rooms had their own adjoining bathrooms and change rooms. This is very seldom seen in today's medical offices.

Dr. Magoon retired in 1959 and it was not until 1970 that another physician joined Drs. Fox and Johnson. The third partner was Michael A. Shea M.D. who remained in practice at this location until 1980. Dr. Shea was in the last group of three residents to graduate from the Valley Medical Center while Dr. Fox was in charge of the program. The other two were Robert C. Allin

M.D. who practiced in Honolulu, Hawaii and David L. Garrison M.D. who practiced in St. Joseph, Missouri.

Private practice for Dr. Fox was very successful and busy. When asked after his retirement how many babies he had delivered in his career, his answer was about ten thousand. He could have been even more specific as he had written down all the names and dates of every mother he had delivered, even in his training years. Queried about his most challenging cases, he recalls two. The first was a lady with twins who had severe polyhydramnios (excess fluid in the sac around the baby). She went into labor and because of the large amount of fluid in the uterus she started having heart failure. He placed a plastic catheter into the sac and drained off eight gallons of fluid. The mother survived but the premature twins who were very small did not live. The second case Dr. Fox remembered vividly was one referred to him by a local ob physician. The patient was a hospital nurse having her first baby. She was in active labor but the baby was in a breech position. When Dr. Fox arrived the baby's trunk was delivered but the head was locked in the birth canal. After much difficulty the delivery was completed but the infant did suffer spinal cord injuries with residual defects. These cases stood out in Dr. Fox's mind not only because of the complications but because of the outcomes. However there were hundreds and hundreds of other complicated pregnancies where, because of his knowledge and skill, good outcomes were the result. He had a large referral source from many of the family practitioners in the area. Even other obstetricians would ask for consultation for their more difficult cases. He was also known as a very accomplished gyn surgeon. He paid particular attention to anatomical details in his abdominal and vaginal hysterectomies. This attention to details no doubt began with his preceptorship with Dr. Shufelt.

Although hard work was his trademark, Dr. Fox always reserved two weeks in July for a vacation. One of his favorite destinations was a cabin near Vida, Oregon. There he enjoyed fly fishing on the McKenzie River. It was here that Leon and his family could spend quiet days together away from the pressures and time constraints of private practice.

ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIPS

The following list of medical and civic affiliations with positions held is presented here in order to appreciate what incredible accomplishments he achieved during his lifetime. These are even more remarkable when viewed in the context of a large private practice.

Hospitals

O'Connor Hospital - active 1938 to 1970
Chief of Staff 1946 to 1948

San Jose Hospital - active 1938 to 1985
Chief of Staff 1960

Santa Clara Valley Medical Center - active 1938 to 1985
Chief of Staff 1953 to 1956

Professional Organizations

Santa Clara County Medical Society - 1937 to 1985
President 1957

California Medical Association - 1937 to 1985
Delegate 1946

American Medical Association - 1937 to 1985
Delegate 1966

American Association for Maternal and Child Health
President 1972

California Association for Maternal and Child Health
President 1971

American College of Surgeons
Fellow 1941

Shufelt Gynecological Society of Santa Clara Valley
Founder 1946
President 1957 to 1959

Peninsula Gynecological Society
President 1954

American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology
Founding Fellow 1957
District VIII, Vice Chairman 1969 to 1972

Professional Organizations (con't)

District VIII, Representative to the committee on nominations 1971 to 1972
Committee on Health Care Delivery 1973 to 1976
Treasurer 1976 to 1982

Pacific Coast Ob/Gyn Society - 1956 to 1985
President 1980 to 1981

San Francisco Gyn Society - 1956 to 1985
President 1966 to 1967

American Board of Ob/Gyn
Diplomat 1948

Santa Clara County Tuberculosis Association

Santa Clara County Chapter of American Cancer Society
President 1961

Santa Clara County Chapter of American Heart Society
President 1956

San Jose Chapter American Red Cross Blood Bank
Director 1948

New York Academy of Sciences - 1964

Public Health League of California
Councilor 1964 to 1970

California Political Medical Action Committee
Director 1968 to 1972

Institute for Medical Research
Vice President 1976

Civic

City of San Jose Advisory Board of Health - 1946 to 1951

San Jose Rotary Club - 1941 to 1985

San Francisco Common Wealth Club

Boys City Boys Club
Director 1958
President 1965

Calvary Methodist Church Board of Trustees

Civic (con't)

San Jose City College of Nursing
Advisory Board

San Jose State University of Nursing
Advisory Board

San Jose Hospital of Nursing
Advisory Board

The aforementioned position of chief of staff at the three hospitals is no ordinary task. It is the highest elected position for a physician in a governing role at a given hospital. The chief of staff is responsible for varifying credentials of applicants to the hospital medical staff, ensuring quality of care for patients, initiating any disciplinary actions that may be neccessary and carrying out all the other rules and regulations that apply to the medical staff. He conducts monthly executive council meetings made up of all the various department chairmen. Quarterly meetings of the entire physician membership of the hospital are also the responsibility of the chief of staff. These duties required many hours away from the office and were all done gratuitously.

LITTLE LEARNERS

One of the organizations that is not on the above list but needs recognition, as it was one of Dr. Fox's favorites, was called the Little Learners. This home based club was formed in 1933 by ten San Jose physicians of varying specialties. When Leon joined in 1938 there were thirty members. This eclectic group would meet monthly at one of the members' homes and the medical subject would be presented by one of the members. Food and drink were also enjoyed by all. In 1985 Leon hosted, what was to be, his last Little Learners meeting. One participant remembers Leon opening a special thirty year old bottle of Chateau Lafite Rothschild, saying that this was a special wine for a special time. Dr. Donald Threlfall, one of the original founders, penned a memorable editorial in the 1972 book on the history of the Little Learners. He may well have had Leon in mind when he wrote, "it fascinates me to rub shoulders and be associated with men who

are so respected on so many levels: not just county, but state, national and world, all from this little group.”³

MAN OF THE CENTURY

A man of the century award only comes along every one hundred years or so. On May 14, 1976, this unusual honor was conferred upon Leon Fox by the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center on its centennial anniversary celebration. The event was held at the San Jose Hyatt House and included in the two hundred and fifty attendees were all the former residents who had graduated from the ob/gyn residency program under Dr. Fox. Cited as some of the reasons for the award were his forty years of dedicated service to that hospital, his ob/gyn chairmanship from 1959 to 1970 and his being chief of staff from 1953 to 1956. The selection was a carefully kept secret and it did surprise Dr. Fox. Upon receipt of the plaque he remarked that it left him speechless, added a thank you and promptly sat down. This was typical Leon Fox. The man who had done so much for his patients and peers throughout his lifetime would rarely talk about himself.

THE FINAL DAYS

In December of 1984 Dr. Fox began to experience some worrisome symptoms suggesting a possible brain tumor. A CT Scan confirmed a lesion in the brain and a needle biopsy revealed cancer. Surgery was ruled out and he was treated with external radiation and chemotherapy. The prognosis was not good but he continued to work in the office during 1985. He passed away quietly April 29, 1986 in his home on South Sixteenth Street where he had lived for thirty nine years. The most poignant and meaningful memorial came from the physicians, nurses and staff of the Obstetric Department at Valley Medical Center. It is a fitting tribute to the man and his life.

“Dr. Fox generously gave of his knowledge, skills and services throughout his lifetime. We will dearly miss his presence, but we all have a bit of his wisdom to cherish and keep forever.”⁴

END NOTES

¹
“Oral interview: Leon P. Fox M.D.,” Santa Clara County Medical Association,
3 Nov. 1985: 1

²
“Oral interview: Leon P. Fox M.D.” 13

³
“Donald R. Threlfall, The Little Learners (San Jose: Santa Clara County Medical Society,
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⁴
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